



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

INDONESIA

Special Deliveries: Portrait of a Village Midwife



Midwife Ratna

"We are all the children of Ibu Ratna. That's what they chant when I'm walking."

The village 'bidan' – or midwife – of Lam Gaboh, Banda Aceh, has something of a global reputation. She grew up in the tiny seaside village. At a very young age she decided she wanted to be a midwife. After the 2004 tsunami, she continued to work at her clients' bedsides because the 'polindes' – a village-based birthing clinic – had been destroyed. After it was renovated in early 2006 by USAID, one of the midwife's very thankful clients named her baby after the agency.

Little 'Usaidi' proved a photogenic and healthy child, and both newborn and midwife got their fair share of attention. Not long afterwards, the midwife made 'development news' again when she saved the life of a woman who had severely hemorrhaged during delivery. The midwife attributed her life-saving skills to the training she had received from USAID.

But often in development assistance, it is not just about what or how much you give. Sometimes it is about who you give it to. In the case of Lam Gaboh, the USAID-renovated clinic could be handing out gold pacifiers and without this particular village midwife, the clinic might well be empty.

Ibu Ratna, the midwife of Lam Gaboh is 32 years old and has been helping women give birth for eleven years.

Ratna always knew what she was going to do. "It was a calling," she explains. And to this day, Ratna is still fearless when she wants to do something. Even something like saving a life.

"You can lose a mother in childbirth in just 15 minutes," Ratna tells a visitor. "In a crisis, 15 minutes feels like 15 seconds. You have to think fast. I'm a very fast thinker," Ratna says smiling. Her clients hold their newborns and nod their heads, "She's fast alright," says one. Everyone laughs. Ratna has never been one to hold back and she does not have a poker face. That is why everyone wants her to be their midwife. "It isn't that she shows no fear," explained one mother. "It's that she is fearless." It's a good quality to have in a midwife.

It was also a good quality to have on the 26th of December, 2004. In those first few moments after the earthquake, Ratna remembered a verse from her youth; something she had learned in her Qur'anic studies. "Something about how after the earth shook, the water would rise up. I don't know why I remembered it," admits Ratna. In those few moments, Ratna grabbed her two babies and foisted them into her mother's arms. She shoved them all out of the house. She told her husband to take everyone up the mountain.



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Then she heard the wave – the sound of an airplane far too large to be anywhere near Banda Aceh, and yet as if it were about to land. Then Ratna turned and ran in the opposite direction of the mountains, toward the sea.

Ratna had remembered one of her patients was due – as in ‘about to give birth’. She ran to the woman’s home and dragged the heavily pregnant client up the mountain. “I stayed with her for three days and nights on that mountain. Thanks to God she did not go into labor!” she says, laughing.

Since the day of the tsunami, Ratna enjoys her work even more. “It’s more of a spiritual experience for me now. I’m more religious in general now. God gave us proof that life is serious.”

Now, as Ratna walks about Lam Gaboh, all the children run to be by her side. “We are all the children of Ibu Ratna. That’s what they chant when I’m walking,” she says.